



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Big Bend National Park
P.O. Box 129
Big Bend National Park, TX 79834

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For More Information Contact:
David Elkowitz (432) 477-1108

Big Bend National Park News Release

BIG BEND NATIONAL PARK PLANS A PRESCRIBED FIRE OPERATION

Big Bend National Park plans to start prescribed fire operations the week of June 12, 2006, if environmental factors such as wind, temperature, relative humidity, and fuel moisture levels are favorable. The prescribed fire is planned to last up to one week, including initial preparations, the actual burn, and clean-up activities. The area to be burned includes two plots, for a total of 692 acres along the Rio Grande, immediately downstream of Santa Elena Canyon and starting again downstream of the Santa Elena Canyon river access point.

The burn's objectives are to remove the canopy of exotic plants (tamarisk) along this stretch of river, to begin historic scene restoration (Sublett Farm Historic District) by restoring the historically open floodplain after the burn, and to retain native vegetation such as willows. In addition, use of prescribed fire in this area is expected to be one of the most effective tools available to resource managers for restoring and maintaining flood dependent ecosystems. Prescribed fires are based on burn plans that must be approved by the park Superintendent before any of the recommended actions are implemented. Park fire managers plan the prescribed burns in consultation with resource managers, and all prescribed fires are managed with firefighter and public safety as the first priority.

Thorough planning is used to minimize smoke and visitor closures; however, it is impossible to predict weather patterns and smoke behavior with complete accuracy. Smoke impacts or delays may be possible along the adjacent trails. Road and trail closures will include Route 16 (from the Desert Overlook Wayside pullout), Santa Elena Canyon Overlook, Santa Elena Canyon Trail and Trailhead, and the river access point. These closures will be kept to the shortest timeframe possible, and are expected to last at least during the one day of fire ignition.

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